

Car Park Pre-Consultation Response – Audlem Parish Council

On behalf of the residents of Audlem and surrounding areas, Audlem Parish Council very strongly opposes the introduction of parking fees for its village Car Park. There are many significant reasons for this opposition, including but not limited to:

Audlem is a village, not a town and is comprised of a number of settlements away from the core of the village: Kinsey Heath, Cox Bank, Swanbach, Copthorne and Corbrook. It has a large range of shops and cafes, most of them independently owned that depend on the trade of not only the residents of Audlem, but also the surrounding residents of Buerton, Coole Pilate, Hankelow and Lightwood Green. The only parking available is the car park off Cheshire Street apart from a limited number of parking bays on Cheshire Street (A529) and Shropshire Street (A525). There is no alternative car park in the village. By introducing charges on the car park, there are two likely scenarios:

- Both of these roads already see frequent traffic jams involving HGVs, tractors and cars. Any introduction of charges on the car park will exacerbate the existing problem as more people who live outside the core of the village who use the shops and services are likely to park their cars on these two roads (or adjoining estate roads), or;
- These people are more likely to use a free car park provided by large supermarkets than pay to park in the village. This will inevitably lead to the failure of these, mainly independent shops and cafes. In addition, it will have a negative impact on the environment at a time when we should be reducing carbon emissions.

The more problems there are on the roads of Audlem the more difficult it is for farmers to travel through the village with their machinery. Farmers are a vital part of the economy and produce the food that goes on our tables. In addition, the more congested the roads in Audlem, the more dangerous it is for other road users and pedestrians.

Unlike other centres, there is no regular bus service in Audlem. Buses are mainly every two hours. Therefore, for people who currently use the shops and hospitality services in Audlem and who live outside the core of the village, a car is the only means by which they can get to them. Potentially, this could get worse as there is a review of bus services ongoing.

There are many significant reasons for the opposition of residents and businesses to the introduction of charges, including but not limited to:

Shops and Businesses in Audlem

- As already stated, the viability of the varied range of shops and business in Audlem depend on footfall.
- A number of these shops are speciality shops reliant on customers who come from a wide area. Any introduction of charges could have a significant negative effect on these businesses.
- Some consumers, especially those with young children, are more interested in convenience and are more likely to use a free car park provided by large supermarkets than pay to park in the village, even though we have a diverse range of mainly independent, stores. It is quite likely that they will go to Nantwich or either Market Drayton or Whitchurch thus taking business out of Cheshire as well as Audlem.

- As it is a free car park, it attracts a large number of visitors to Audlem, who come back on a regular basis. A large number of these come from other parts of Cheshire East. These shops, cafes and pubs are all hospitality venues that are additionally reliant on these visitors from outside the immediate area, therefore enabling these businesses to continue trading.
- It is vital for Audlem that a balance is struck between maintaining services and helping local businesses to survive. If they don't, businesses will close and it will have a major detrimental effect on the village.

Audlem Medical Practice

- It is also the car park for Audlem Medical Practice. The size of the surgery warranted 17 parking spaces plus 4 disabled spaces, but only 4 could be provided within the confines of the plot. The other 17 are provided on the main car park. The building is currently being expanded, therefore requiring more spaces to be provided on the car park.
- There are currently 5100 patients belonging to Audlem Medical practice which is growing year on year. They come not only from Audlem, but also the surrounding villages and even from Shropshire. It seems iniquitous to charge patients to be charged for parking to see their medical practitioner. Audlem practice is part of Nantwich rural community care and as such has visiting phlebotomists, nurses and other medical professionals visiting the practice who should not have to pay to park. Nor should the staff who currently work at the medical practice. Charging for parking could well mean that current staff who do not live within the parish or within walking distance of the surgery will leave.
- In addition, Boots the Audlem Pharmacy is a vital service to many communities in the vicinity of Audlem providing the medicines, etc that are prescribed at the surgery. If charges were introduced, this could result in people going to Nantwich, Market Drayton or Whitchurch to collect their prescriptions.

Audlem & District Community Action (ADCA)

- Audlem & District Community Action, provides welfare support to vulnerable and socially isolated adults and older people and their carers. They meet 4 times a week at the Public Hall, adjacent to the car park, helping to prevent rural isolation. Many of these people are brought in by volunteer drivers, who should not be expected to volunteer their free time and then have to pay a parking charge.

Cheshire Constabulary

- The local police hold regular surgeries at the Public Hall, would they be expected to pay to park as well as residents coming to see them?

Audlem School

- The car park is used by both parents and school buses to drop off children. If charges were imposed, it is likely that children would be dropped off near the school, causing serious problems on Heathfield Road.

Other Users

- There are numerous clubs which meet at the Public Hall who benefit from the facilities. With the cost of living crisis it is unreasonable to ask these people to pay to enjoy some recreational activities.
- Visitors to the sports field, tennis club and children's play area visitors have nowhere else to park other than the car park.
- Attendees at the churches use the car park, especially St James' Church in the centre of the village.

- People also use this car park to park when funerals take place either at St James' Church or Audlem Methodist Church. In addition, the car park is used by those people who visit Audlem Cemetery to pay respect to their loved ones.

Lastly but not least, we would like to ask for an extension on the pre-consultation period both for the duration of the period and when it has taken place. In August a lot of the community are away on holiday. Councils do not normally meet in August, so have not been given a reasonable amount of time to discuss this extremely important matter fully.